

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of accessing interactive content as part of an interactive television system, the method comprising:
 - assigning a synthetic channel to correspond to at least one interactive content element available as interactive programming content via the interactive television system;
 - communicating the interactive programming content, including the interactive content element and the corresponding synthetic channel, to a viewer via an electronic programming guide; and
 - providing selection of the synthetic channel corresponding to the interactive content element from the electronic programming guide via a user-actuable device to access the interactive content element.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the user-actuable device comprises a remote control having a plurality of numbered actuatable buttons.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the interactive content element comprises a computer-implemented user application.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the interactive content element comprises a content page maintained at a network storage location.
5. The method of claim 3 wherein the user application comprises an e-mail service.
6. The method of claim 3 wherein the user-application comprises an event calendar.

1 7. The method of claim 3 wherein the user-application comprises a photo
2 album.

3 8. The method of claim 4 wherein the content page comprises a page
4 corresponding to an Internet site.

5 9. The method of claim 4 wherein the content page comprises a page
6 designated by a user via a unique address.

7 10. The method of claim 4 wherein the content page comprises a page
8 maintained on a local server.

9 11. A method of accessing interactive content as part of an interactive
10 television viewing environment, the method comprising:

11 displaying an electronic programming guide including accessible broadcast
12 channels and accessible synthetic channels on a video display device for the interactive
13 television viewing environment;

14 receiving a viewer's selection of a synthetic channel by way of the displayed
15 electronic programming guide;

16 correlating the selected synthetic channel to an interactive content element
17 available by way of the interactive television viewing environment;

18 retrieving the interactive content element from at least one remote location; and

19 displaying the interactive content element on the video display device for the
20 interactive television viewing environment.

21 12. The method of claim 11 wherein selection of the synthetic channel
22 includes actuation of at least one button on a remote control device.

1 13. The method of claim 12 wherein selection of the synthetic channel
2 includes selection of the synthetic channel directly from the electronic programming guide.

3 14. The method of claim 11 wherein correlating the selected synthetic channel
4 to an interactive content element is accomplished via a controller executing a computer-
5 implemented application.

6 15. The method of claim 11 wherein the at least one remote location
7 comprises a database maintained at a broadcast center;

8 and wherein retrieving the interactive content element includes sending an uplink
9 signal to the broadcast center, the uplink signal comprising a request for the interactive content
10 element, and receiving a downlink signal from the broadcast center, the downlink signal
11 comprising the interactive content element.

12 16. The method of claim 15 wherein the uplink signal and the downlink signal
13 comprise communications encoded in a data over cable service interface specification protocol.

14 17. The method of claim 11 wherein retrieving the interactive content element
15 from at least one remote location comprises accessing the interactive content element that is
16 broadcast from a broadcast center using a carousel technique.

17 18. The method of claim 11 wherein the video display device comprises a
18 television.

19 19. The method of claim 11 wherein the interactive content element comprises
20 a computer-implemented user application.

21 20. The method of claim 11 wherein the interactive content element comprises
22 a content page maintained on a server at the remote location.

1 21. The method of claim 11 wherein the interactive content element comprises
2 a system page.

3 22. An interactive television network environment, comprising:
4 a television set;
5 a client terminal having a network interface configured to transmit and receive
6 encoded communication signals, the client terminal being capable of being connected to the
7 television set; and

8 a broadcast center, the broadcast center capable of communication with the client
9 terminal; and

10 wherein the broadcast center is configured to transmit an electronic programming
11 guide to the client terminal, the electronic programming guide including:

12 a listing of channels, the channels comprising cable channels and synthetic
13 channels; and

14 identification of programming content corresponding to each channel; and

15 wherein the client terminal is further configured:

16 to receive a command from a viewer to select a channel from the
17 electronic programming guide, wherein the selected channel comprises a synthetic
18 channel;

19 to transmit an uplink signal to the broadcast center requesting the
20 programming content corresponding to the selected synthetic channel;

21 to receive a downlink signal from the broadcast center, the downlink
22 signal comprising the programming content; and

23 to transmit the programming content to the television set for display.

1 23. The interactive television network environment of claim 22, further
2 comprising a remote control device, the remote control device configured to transmit the
3 command to select a channel from the electronic programming guide.

4 24. The interactive television network environment of claim 22 wherein the
5 synthetic channels comprise functional channels, content channels, or system channels.

6 25. The interactive television network environment of claim 24 wherein the
7 functional channels correspond to interactive programming content, including applications that
8 are executed on behalf of the viewer.

9 26. The interactive television network environment of claim 24 wherein the
10 content channels correspond to interactive programming content, including content pages
11 maintained at a network storage location.

12 27. The interactive television network environment of claim 24 wherein the
13 system channels correspond to interactive programming content, including system pages that
14 allow the viewer to administer a viewing environment via the client terminal.

15 28. An electronic programming guide, comprising:
16 a channel field, the channel field including a listing of available cable channels
17 and available synthetic channels; and
18 a content field, the content field including a current programming schedule
19 corresponding to each available cable channel, and an interactive content element corresponding
20 to each available synthetic channel.

21 29. The electronic programming guide of claim 28 wherein the synthetic
22 channels comprise functional channels, content channels, or system channels.

30. The electronic programming guide of claim 28 wherein the interactive content element comprises a computer-implemented user application.

31. The electronic programming guide of claim 28 wherein the interactive content element comprises a content page maintained at a network storage location.

32. The electronic programming guide of claim 31 wherein the content page comprises a home page corresponding to an Internet site.

33. The electronic programming guide of claim 31 wherein the content page comprises a page other than a home page corresponding to an Internet site.

34. The electronic programming guide of claim 31 wherein the content page comprises a page designated by a user via a unique address.

35. An article of manufacture, comprising:
a computer-readable medium containing a set of instructions to:
transmit an electronic programming guide from a broadcast center to a client terminal, the electronic programming guide comprising:

a channel field, the channel field including a list of available cable channels and available synthetic channels; and

a content field, the content field including a current programming schedule corresponding to each available cable channel, and an interactive content element corresponding to each available synthetic channel;

receive an uplink signal from the client terminal, the signal comprising a request for an interactive content element;

retrieve the interactive content element from a memory storage device; and

1 transmit a downlink signal to the client terminal, the downlink signal comprising
2 the interactive content element.

3 36. The article of manufacture of claim 35 wherein the interactive content
4 element comprises a computer-implemented user application.

5 37. The article of manufacture of claim 35 wherein the interactive content
6 element comprises a content page maintained at a network storage location, including a server.

7 38. A method of accessing interactive content as part of an interactive
8 television viewing environment, the method comprising:

9 receiving a first interactive command from a remote control device to activate an
10 electronic programming guide;

11 displaying the electronic programming guide including accessible broadcast
12 channels and accessible synthetic channels on a video display device for the interactive
13 television viewing environment;

14 receiving a second interactive command from the remote control device to select a
15 synthetic channel by way of the displayed electronic programming guide;

16 correlating the selected synthetic channel to a first interactive content element
17 available by way of the interactive television viewing environment;

18 retrieving the first interactive content element from at least one remote location;

19 displaying the first interactive content element on the video display device for the
20 interactive television viewing environment;

21 providing for interaction with the interactive content element by way of
22 commands received from the remote control device;

1 receiving a third interactive command from the remote control device to link to a
2 second interactive content element, the second interactive content element linked to the first
3 interactive content element;

4 retrieving the second interactive content element from at least one remote
5 location;

6 displaying the second interactive content element on the video display device for
7 the interactive television viewing environment;

8 receiving a fourth interactive command from the remote control device to link to a
9 third interactive content element, the third interactive content element linked to the second
10 interactive content element;

11 retrieving the third interactive content element from at least one remote location;
12 and

13 displaying the third interactive content element on the video display device for the
14 interactive television viewing environment.

15 39. The method of claim 38, further comprising:

16 receiving at least one additional interactive command from the remote control
17 device to link to at least one additional interactive content element, the at least one additional
18 interactive content element linked to a previous interactive content element;

19 retrieving the at least one additional interactive content element from at least one
20 remote location; and

21 displaying the at least one additional interactive content element on the video
22 display device for the interactive television viewing environment.